

Chapter 6. Public Participation

Public participation and input was sought from the very beginning of the planning process to provide opportunities for participation using a variety of methods selected to meet the needs of different audiences.

A set of eleven interactive teams, with sponsorship by the Bureau of Endangered Resources and a multi-program Coordination Team at the “hub,” were assigned specific roles in the planning process. Section 2.1 provides a description of each these teams, including their roles, responsibilities, and members.

For the broader range of interested conservation partners and publics, the Coordination Team sought to provide balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the *Strategy's* purpose, approach, outcomes, and benefits and in knowing when and how to provide feedback or input. A series of initial mailings were followed by an opportunity for all those interested to attend a nearby Regional Briefing (six of these briefings were located around the state) to learn about the Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their habitats and then to suggest specific threats, issues, and conservation actions relevant to those species and their habitats. The briefings were followed by additional mailings to update participants on the process and inform them as to how the information they provided had been used.

The statewide review of the draft *Strategy* was well publicized and provided an opportunity for all interested parties to review the technical document; specific invitations to review relevant sections of the document were extended to known experts, conservation biologists, and others across the state to ensure adequate technical review of the draft *Strategy* contents. An update with the Executive Summary, including *Strategy* highlights, announcements, and information on the statewide technical review, was posted on the website, announced in press releases, and mailed to the 600-person *Strategy* mailing list for those people and groups who preferred to be informed rather than take part in the technical review.

Participation by the broader range of interested conservation partners and the general public is expected to further increase after the *Strategy* is approved and we move into the implementation phase. At that time we will use results and excerpts from this technical document to develop additional outreach materials that will inform and involve broader conservation audiences.

6.1 Communication and Coordination for *Strategy* Development

Beginning in February 2004, the Coordination Team prepared outreach materials on the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation planning process, the purpose of the planning effort, the required elements from Congress, and State Wildlife Grant program materials, in addition to various pieces of technical and guidance information for participating teams and interested individuals or groups to use. A webpage provided updates and kept the most current information available to participants and the public. The webpage, <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/cwcp/>, also serves as a permanent archive for planning information and will continue to be updated throughout the acceptance and implementation phases of the *Strategy*.

Outlined below are significant events in the development of Wisconsin's *Strategy for Species of Greatest Conservation Need*. These events also highlight the opportunities provided for public participation.

February, 2004 – First external Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan Advisory Team meeting. Included discussion of the criteria to be used to identify Wisconsin's Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

April 2004 – Natural Resources Board informational briefing.

May, 2004 – Initial opportunities for various parties to become informed about and involved in the planning process:

- Initial mailing to a broad range of conservation partners that described the *Strategy* development and how to get on a mailing list to receive updates and participate in planning (Appendix E. Public Involvement Materials).
- Invitation to tribal chairpersons to participate in and be kept informed of the planning process.
- Invitation to Bird, Fish, Herptile, Mammal, and Invertebrate experts to serve on one of the five Taxa Teams.

May & June 2004 – Hired five Regional Ecologists to play a major role in assembling the *Strategy* and serve as regional advocates for the *Strategy*.

June & July 2004 – Advisory Team meetings. Reviewed the preliminary results of the application of criteria to identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

June 2004 to April 2005– Taxa Team members. Ongoing correspondence to identify and review the list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need; identify and review species associations with natural communities and Ecological Landscapes; and identify and review threats, issues, and priority conservation actions.

September & October 2004 – Advisory Team correspondence. Updates on applying scientific criteria to identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

November & December, 2004 – Preparation for Regional Briefings

- Advisory Team meetings. Reviewed the classification systems used to assign Species of Greatest Conservation Need to natural communities and Ecological Landscapes; reviewed process for identifying threats, issues, and priority conservation actions; and provided input on the format and content of the upcoming Regional Briefing meetings.
- Mailing and statewide press release (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/news/on/2004/on041223.htm#art2>) inviting people to participate in January Regional Briefings and encouraging them to be involved in the planning process (Appendix E).

January 2005 – Regional Briefings. Over 340 people attended six Regional Briefings held throughout the state (Green Bay, LaCrosse, Madison, Milwaukee, Rhinelander, and Spooner).

February 2005 – Updates with tribal contacts. Department Regional Ecologists sent Regional Briefing materials to local tribal contacts and/or biologists and followed up with phone calls and/or emails.

February 2005 - Progress Report. Posted on the web site and sent to over 600 people on mailing list as well as all who attended the Regional Briefings. Provided an update on planning progress and feedback received at the January Regional Briefings (Appendix E).

April, 2005 – Working Draft review in preparation for the Statewide Review.

- Taxa Teams, Advisory Team, and other collaborators peer reviewed selected sections of the draft *Strategy*.
- Briefing held in Madison with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Region 3 staff members; they provided initial, positive feedback on selected sections of draft *Strategy* and offered helpful suggestions.

June & July 2005 – Preparation of the *Strategy* for Natural Resources Board approval and submission to the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

- Statewide review of the draft *Strategy* by experts, conservation partners and others interested in participating in the technical review.
- Continued information and updates posted on the web and sent to all on the mailing list.
- Press releases to the general public announcing availability of draft *Strategy* for statewide review (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/news/on/2005/on050607.htm#art1>).

August, 2005 – Progress Report. Provided a summary of types of recommendations, questions, and concerns received during the statewide review as well as an explanation of how these issues were addressed within the subsequent revisions made to the *Strategy* (Appendix E).

August 17, 2005 – Natural Resources Board accepted Wisconsin's *Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need*. Letters of support from several Advisory Team members accompanied the *Strategy* (Appendix F. Letters of Support). Press release announcing Natural Resources Board approval can be reviewed at (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/news/rbnews/2005/081705co2.htm>).

6.2 Communication and Coordination for *Strategy* Implementation

After the *Strategy* is accepted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, outreach materials for the general public will be developed. As part of the review and revision process (see Chapter 7), interested conservation partners and publics will be kept informed of updates, evaluations, and opportunities to participate.

Communication and coordination with partners and interested citizens will be important in *Strategy* implementation. The Department of Natural Resources will lead, develop, and manage *Strategy*-related communications in the future. In order to ensure successful *Strategy* implementation, ongoing communications will be pursued in these areas:

- Informational updates to partners and other stakeholders on the *Strategy* implementation progress, *Strategy* reviews and revisions, and responses to the adaptive management approach.
- Web site updates and improvements.
- Coordination of State Wildlife Grant application, allocation, and evaluation.
- Annual summary of the *Strategy* accomplishments, achievements, advances, and modifications that occur from on-the-ground projects funded by State Wildlife Grants.
- Continued development of the *Strategy* database into a communication and data dissemination tool for partners to access via the web.
- Continued encouragement for use of the *Strategy* and database as guidance for statewide conservation programs.